

The Question of National Defense

[Speech of Hon. Isaac R. Sherwood, of Ohio, in the House of Representatives, January 4, 1916.]

Mr. Sherwood. Mr. Speaker, of course we will have horrors and horrors on account of this barbarous submarine warfare; but the worst that can happen is the severance of diplomatic relations with any and all Empires across the Atlantic wherein American citizens are murdered. But this does not mean war. On our southwestern border during the past two years 153 American citizens have been brutally murdered, not because they were on a ship carrying the flag of a belligerent or were found with a hostile army, but solely because they were American citizens, unarmed noncombatants.

All these unspeakable horrors did not happen in a hostile zone 3,000 miles away, but within 100 miles of our own borders. This submarine warfare is the most cowardly and barbarous of all warfare since the world began. And yet we are building a whole brood of submarines.

War is the greatest crime of the human race. It is not in my philosophy that if the murder of one man makes a villain, the murder of thousands makes a hero. It is in my philosophy that the hero of humane achievement in the uplift of his fellows transcends the hero of blood and iron and noise in a war of conquest. It is as true today as 87 years ago, when uttered by that greatest of Englishmen, Thomas Carlyle:

A standing army means waste, depression, and moral decay. No nation can improve its morals or grow in strength when its bravest and best sons are year by year devoured in the army.

This is the stand taken today by the sanest statesmen and ripest scholars of the age. A great student of ethics says: "The soul grows in the direction of its attention."

A nation, which is only the aggregation of individual souls, can not be moving toward peace while definitely preparing for war.

It is with the deepest regret that I am unable to agree with the President on his proposed plan of national defense. The President has rendered great service to the country by his superb diplomacy in keeping the country in the path of peace. He has had more difficult and perplexing problems to solve than any President since the adoption of our federal constitution, and his unflinching devotion to duty, his superb poise and masterful grasp of the many diplomatic problems, which he has settled in the interest of peace, entitle him to the lasting gratitude of all the people. I believe, however, that he has mistaken the popular judgment in his preparedness message. I believe the defeat of this scheme for extra taxation at this time, when the federal treasury is lank and lean, will command the approval and support of a majority of the people.

While I have been a peace man for over half a century, I have never been a peace-at-any-price devotee. Neither am I a member of any society or association for limiting national armament. I am not from Missouri, but before I vote to waste any more money to increase idle armies or top-heavy navies I want to know what emergency exists for such expenditure. Applause.) Up to date none of the advocates of "preparedness" have given congress or the people one valid reason why we should squander any more hard-earned tax money on militarism. Not one of this whole array of pretending patriots have pointed to an enemy either hostile to the United States or liable to attack the United States. Less than one year ago, when the armies of Europe were more powerful, more formidable, than now by at least 5,000,000 soldiers, the President and the secretary of war and the secretary of the navy all took strong grounds, in public interviews and proclamations, that we were fully prepared for any emergency. This is so well known that I need not cumber the Congressional Record with any quotations from their well-timed utterances of sanity and sense. Furthermore, the so-called experts of the army and navy less than one year ago fully fortified the attitude of both the President and his cabinet on this vital question. At the hearings in the last session of congress Gen. Erasmus M. Weaver, chief of coast artillery, whose duty it is, he said, to "be advised as to the character and sufficiency of our seacoast armament," stated:

My information is that our system of fortification is reasonably adequate for all defensive purposes which they are likely to be called upon to meet.

And further said:

I have been a close student of the whole subject, naturally, for a number of years, and I know of no fortifications in the world, as far as my reading, observation, and knowledge goes, that compare favorably in efficiency with ours.

Gen. Crozier, chief of ordnance, considered one of the greatest experts in the country on fortifications and guns, said:

In my opinion, these guns, with other advantages which our land-defense fortifications have, will be adequate for maintaining a successful combat with vessels of war armed with any gun which is now under construction anywhere in the world to my knowledge.

A very distinguished statesman of the republican party, late a candidate for president and a close student of continental events, gives the country the benefit of his investigation as to the origin of this colossal military propaganda. I quote from La Follette's Magazine, which has not yet been sued for libel:

Who are the real patriots of the country? They are the glorious group of multimillionaires who are making such enormous profits out of the European war as were never before realized in the same brief period since time began. They are the Morgans, the Rockefellers, the Schwabs, the Garys, the du Ponts, and their prototypes, who are back of the 38 corporations most benefited by war orders, the stocks of which have increased more than a thousand million dollars above their highest market value before the war. They are the dollar-scarred heroes who organized the Navy League of the United States. Shades of Lincoln! What a band of patriots, with their business connections covering every financial and industrial center in the United States! Owning newspapers, periodicals, and magazines and controlling through business relations the editorial good will of many others, they will be able to render powerful but disinterested aid in the great propaganda for preparedness now flooding the country.

The bold Wisconsin editor and statesman gives us an adequate idea of the original source of the viperous hellbroth of threatening war now sending its malignant poison through war-scare journals and magazines into the hearts and homes of thousands of well-meaning, timid Americans.

Congress, under the constitution, is the only power competent to declare war. If there is any enemy in sight or likely to attack the United States, it is the sole duty of congress to take the initiative; and the power to declare war implies the power to make all preparations for war. Article I, section 8, of the original constitution, also states that congress shall have power to provide for the common defense. Hence it follows that congress has the sole power not only to declare war, but to provide for the common defense, and congress will be held strictly to account by the people in the coming November for any ill-timed or unnecessary laws, whether enacted through fear of an impossible enemy or because a powerful and greed-hungry cabal demanded the sacrifice. No individual member of congress can shift the responsibility for his vote on this the most vital question of the hour upon either the President or his cabinet.

In all our history, from the first proclamation of the federal constitution, signed by George Washington as president, September 17, 1787, until now, no political party, no leading statesman or leading publicist has ever before advocated a great standing army and navy in time of peace. Whenever we are liable to be confronted with an armed enemy I will vote for as many armed men and as much money as the President may demand; and, furthermore, I will volunteer as a soldier to go to the front, which is more than any of this powerful array of culpable curmudgeons, who originated this horrid war scare, will ever do. (Applause.)

It is now up to this congress to decide whether all the sacred history of the past, sacred because humane and successful for over a hundred years of undisturbed peace, shall continue to endure in the purpose and hope of its founders, or whether we shall enter the devious path of world-power exploitation. Militarism and imperialism are a couplet of devious devils that will carry the American people on the down grade speedily. You can not separate militarism from imperialism. To use an unclerical expression, they are twin-devils of rapacity and moral decay — useless one without the other. Like the Siamese twins of long-time memory, they are coursed with the same blood, and if you cut the umbilical cord both will languish and die. (Applause.)

Here is what George Allen England says of this humbug scare, misnamed "preparedness":

The whole thing is perfectly obvious. Seizing upon the European butchery as an excuse, the armament makers and militarists are determined to drive this country over the brink if they can. They remain indifferent to all truisms such as that "preparedness" has not prevented but has always induced war. There is money in this thing for them; so down with old age pensions, educational expansion, improvements of all kinds, and hurrah for Moloch. Militarism is a quick cut to millions. Moloch, militarism, murder, massacre—I think that sums it all up with neatness and dispatch.

The Toledo Blade, of my district, the oldest daily journal in northwestern Ohio of the republican faith, says:

Sherwood stands alone among the Ohio delegation on the preparedness program.

While this is evidently a mistake, I should not feel lonesome or discouraged were it true. Not long ago the Ohio State Journal, another old-time republican paper, published in the state capital, printed an editorial with the following closing paragraph:

We wish Ohio could take a positive stand for peace in the halls of congress. It has not done so. There is only one man who has represented his constituents faithfully upon this matter, and that is Gen. Sherwood, of the Toledo district. He has sounded the true note every time.

Well, I have been alone before. The bill of May 13, 1908, to build a harbor of safety and a dry dock at Pearl Harbor in the Sandwich Islands, a bill providing for spending over \$3,000,000 invoked much skyrocket oratory on the floor of the house. There was fear of a formidable raid on our Pacific coast by Japan. One of the leading orators of this eventful day was Capt. Hobson, of Alabama. He convinced the alert-eared members that Japan was about to attack the United States and assume warlike control of the great Pacific ocean, and without this ocean control America would be lost. The measure passed this house with a hurrah—229 yeas to 1 no, as I remember. On a roll call I was the only member voting against it. The tally clerk, out of sheer pity, came to me and said, "You are the only one voting 'no'; I thought you had made a mistake." Let us see.

Our biggest battleships have a water displacement of 26 feet and the entrance to Pearl Harbor has only a depth, as I learn, of about 15 feet, and the bottom is coral rock. Hence, if we should happen to have a war with Japan and a naval conflict should occur 2,000 miles from the Pacific coast and one or more of our battleships should be disabled and should seek safety in Pearl Harbor, it would hardly be able to skim through 15 feet of water depth with a battleship of 26 feet water displacement. Amount expended for dredging to date \$3,296,000. And yet the original foolhardy Pearl Harbor preparedness was as well grounded in sanity and sense as the present plan of "preparedness" and not so expensive by some \$445,000,000.

SOME STAGGERING FIGURES

For the 10 years preceding the European war we had expended on our navy over \$300,000,000 more than Germany or any other nation except Great Britain.

These estimates almost stagger belief; and yet this is not all the advocates of "preparedness" demand. If carried into national law, it means national bankruptcy; of course, the swift ruin of the democratic party, if a majority votes for this stupendous, uncalled-for extravagance. There is sure to be a healthy change of heart when the facts are known among all classes of patriotic, peace-loving American citizens. Very few persons who are talking about "preparedness" have any adequate idea of the immense tax burden involved, not only for this year but for all the coming years. Here are the staggering figures, all to be provided for in a new tax bill:

The five-year naval program calls for an increase of \$500,000,000—\$100,000,000 increase a year—which, including the expenses for expanding the whole naval establishment, will reach \$600,000,000 or over by the time the five years expire. This is all extra—in addition to the large appropriations we are now making for our idle, top-heavy navy. The army four-year program demands \$450,000,000 increase, over \$100,000,000 a year extra, being an increase of more than 100 per cent over our annual army appropriations. All extra appropriations. At the expiration of the five-year period for the program this country will then be expending on its army and navy more than any nation in the world in times of peace ever expended.

In 1891 the navy had 1,483 officers, exclusive of 239 naval cadets at the naval academy. The number of enlisted men allowed in 1891 was